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ABSTRACT

The deployment of National Guard and Reserve forces and active duty soldiers has created new veterans of a foreign war. What role should education and educational benefits play in their return to civilian life? Since 1944, GI Bills have financed the college education of a large group of veterans, and have come to be viewed by some as a right--as a way to become what they might not have otherwise become. Post-Vietnam veterans, however, did not have a GI Bill, and were only eligible for either the Veteran's Educational Assistance Program, which offered matching grants up to $5,400, or the more successful Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB), which provided up to $300 per month for 36 months. Although Gulf veterans are eligible for MGIB benefits, they should be afforded the same educational benefits offered to other combat era veterans. A related question is how veterans should be treated in academia, particularly in speech courses. As the option to speak in the army is strictly reserved, giving a classroom speech can be frightening for a veteran. One solution has been to have a "vets section" of the class. In general, the basic speech course can be a good place to welcome the veteran to civilian life. Such a course can become a forum for the education of both the veteran and civilians. Veterans could discuss their experiences, their language, the environmental consequences of the war, and public policy. In this way, the classroom can become an extension of the societal support for veterans. (PRA)

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Legality Behind Diversity in the Classroom: Veteran Affairs

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INTRODUCTION

When Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, the United States was confronted with a number of options. Some were military, some diplomatic. Setting aside a tradition started, perhaps wrongly, during the Vietnam conflict, the United States government elected to use National Guard and Reserve units in many critical wartime roles.

Our Guard and Reserve tradition is rich, no matter our thoughts on war. In memory for many of us are the massive call-ups for World War II, when the first line troops were filled with National Guardsmen. During the police action in Korea, National Guard troops were again mobilized. While the draft was used in both, conscription became the rule during the Vietnam Era. Without the draft, and with the perceived immediacy of the Gulf Crisis, the government returned to a use of the National Guard and Reserves. As Alan Sabrosky, Center for Strategic and International Studies put it, "The decision to activate the National Guard early in the crisis reflects the administration's appreciation of the strategic and political consequences of not doing so during the Vietnam War" (Wood). Conscription was a disaster, and the Guard was not involved. In the present situation, the Guard was available, arguably well-trained, and mobile. Of the 532,000 troops committed to the Gulf, 15 percent were drawn from the Guard and Reserve (*U. S. News and World Report*, p. 74).

The deployment of Guard and Reserve forces and active duty soldiers has created a "new" class of citizen--a new veteran of a foreign war. By April 15, some of those called up will have approximately 8 months of active service, in excess of the 181 days (not for training) normally required to achieve veteran status. The question to ponder is two-fold--what benefits should these veterans receive, and what role should education play in their return to civilian life? Since the call-up has been authorized to last up to two years, we may not see many returning veterans in the fall.

This forum may not be the place to answer the first part of the question, but I wonder how many of us have stopped to consider the veteran, especially the Guard and

Reserve. He or she has been uprooted from a "normal" life. Granted, in this case, a commitment to serve if called upon was part of the normalcy, and one which, it can be argued, provided training and income in its own right. Membership in the National Guard also brings the man or woman involved significant educational benefits. A simplification of the question may be "How do we reward present veterans?" One answer is that we don't. Rejecting that, the new veteran should be given educational benefits akin to the "old" GI Bill.

THE "GI BILL" AND ITS SUCCESSORS

The first GI Bill was passed by Congress in 1944 as a political weapon against economic upheaval and domestic unrest. It sought to reward veterans by establishing benefits for education. The veterans' marches of the previous decade was a strong reminder of the strength of the groups involved. In its philosophy, the old GI Bill gave veterans an opportunity to not work, be educated, and perhaps not protest against what were predicted to be grave post war economic conditions (Olson, 17-24).

It was anticipated that a few veterans would avail themselves to the program. The surprise, however, was unexpected. Olson states that "When the last student received [his/her] last check (in 1956), the V. A. counted 2,232,000 veterans who had attended colleges under the GI Bill (Olson, 43). The program was numerically superior to anything expected by the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations. More importantly, however, was the superiority of those who colleges. According to Olson, "They overshadowed their nonveteran classmates, dominated American campuses, and surprised prognosticators. Faculty and administrators, overcoming caution and even fear, hailed them collectively as the best college students ever. Undeniably, they differed more from the students they succeeded and preceded than has any generation in the history of American education" (43). For some of us, these students became our mentors, if not ourselves. For some of us, myself included, the GI Bill eventually became viewed as a precious right. It became a way to become what we might not have otherwise been.

Military actions in Korea prompted the government to provide veterans with another GI Bill. A Congressional Research Service report indicates that 43 percent of those eligible, or 2.4 million, used their benefits. Eligibility expired on January 31, 1955, but again the program seemed to exceed expectation. Like the earlier program, eligibility lasted ten years (Smith, 2).

Our excursion into Southeast Asia produced yet another GI Bill. It was enacted in 1966, and allowed service since the Korean Era to count for veterans credit. Benefits were a little better for veterans who served in Vietnam, because at one point 45 months of education were allowed, rather than 36. Eligibility ended in 1989. The CRS states that approximately 8.2 million persons (61 percent) used this benefit.

To many veterans, and perhaps to the founders, "bill" means "Bill of Rights." I have used many veterans benefits, all guaranteed, but I view this one as the most important. Also important to note is that the GI Bill, as presently understood, is a benefit to those who have served during times of international armed conflict (Beirut, Grenada and Panama aside). It is a war benefit. Veterans who fell outside the scope of the Vietnam Era bill, for example, could participate in another program (Smith, 2).

Post-Vietnam veterans could enroll in the Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP). Under this program, the government matched soldier contributions on a 2 to 1 basis, to a maximum contribution by the government of $5,400. The CRS reports that only 43 percent enrolled and that 58 percent of those enrolled ultimately discontinued enrollment. Only 198,000 received VEAP benefits. In no way could the VEAP be viewed as a GI Bill.

The VEAP was replaced by the Montgomery G. I. Bill (MGIB) for persons entering the military after June 30, 1985. The CRS reports that "Contributions are required, and individuals can receive a basic educational benefit of up to $300 per month for 36 months (Smith, 4). The MGIB seems effective, with nearly 71 percent enrollment, compared to 43 percent for the VEAP (Smith, 5).

PRESENT "VETERANS"

Those presently serving in the Gulf are probably eligible for MGIB benefits, when they achieve normal active duty status of 180 days. A question, a political one, and one of fairness, arises. Should these veterans be afforded a program of educational benefits offered to other combat era veterans? My answer is an unequivocal "yes."

In all fairness to the panel and the topic, however, I cannot imagine the issue arising had the U. S. not committed troops to combat in the Middle East. From a practical point of view, that date is not January 16, when bombing began, nor is it the day we invaded Kuwait as liberators. The date of deployment is important, and the civilian politicians will accurately determine it. August appeared a good month for some Guards around here, and November was no Thanksgiving. For sake of argument, August 2 is a date which pushed the world to the brink of war. My own opinion is that we now have a class of veterans (anyone mobilized from Guard or Reserve status, and active forces) that we didn't have before. All qualify for the MGIB, but I doubt if many of the new "veterans" thought much of investing their wages when Saudi Arabia beckoned. For all of them, I suggest a new GI Bill, as a reward. This view is at least partly shared by Congress. According to the *U. S. News and World Report* "Amid the national euphoria,...lawmakers have proposed roughly $1 billion in expanded benefits for veterans and their families, including increased educationassistance..." (*USNWR*, 53).

A reward is needed for these veterans. If not sending Guard and Reserve members to Vietnam was a good political move that went bad, then sending units to the Mideast could be a good political move going bad. SDSU had 61 members mobilized--less than one percent of the student population. One example may show what happened.

I was picking Don Morlan (I fit him into a lot of my polemics) up at the Sioux Falls airport. Don agreed to do a program review for our department. Don and I arrived at the motel in Brookings at 4:50 on a Thursday. I had a call awaiting me at the desk. We had a 6:00 dinner scheduled. The departmental secretary asked me to call a certain student. He

had been notified on Thursday of his mobilization, had to make some immediate decisions about school (which were later altered by Regents' policy) and report to his unit on Saturday morning. This was a kid going to college! That scene was repeated across our nation, as our family, our teachers, our mechanics, our friends were called up. If former veterans were rewarded, for whatever political advantage, these "new veterans" deserve the same.

EDUCATION AND VETERANS

To a more pertinent issue--that of treatment of the veteran as a student. The panel implies that we must make some accommodation to certain groups of people, and of course I agree. The veteran has rights guaranteed to any citizen. If the veteran is handicapped, for example, he or she is guaranteed access (despite the fact that many of our facilities can't provide adequate access). Do we do more for the veteran than we do for any other identifiable group of students? I'm not so sure.

Returning to school as a veteran was traumatic for me. First, I wanted to be a hippie, or something, and South Dakota isn't real conducive to that sort of life style. It was, as many of us know, a cultural thing (Braithwaite, 145-170). Despite the feelings many Vietnam Era veterans had about the dominant culture, the war and often themselves, the educational environment was open to them. As the numbers show, veterans returned from service and went to school.

At the most basic level, veterans deserve no more than other students. Their entry into the educational setting is determined as is that of any other student. If a veteran is a marginal student, access can be difficult, but often admission can be contingent upon certain performance standards. If the veteran is ablebodied, disability access requirements do not apply. If the veteran is a minority student, access is governed by pertinent non-discriminatory standards. In other words, access to educational opportunity by veterans is similar to any other traditional student. We must also remember, veterans who have or have had educational benefits provided them as a result of military service have an

advantage over many other students--they have income for 36 to 45 months, if their academic performance warrants remaining in school.

In addition, veterans have an array of services available to them. The Veterans Administration provides counseling services, which proved most needed following the Vietnam War. Similar services are available on campuses to anyone, and presumably are used by veterans.

So we must get to the core question--How do we treat veterans in academic disciplines, particularly in speech courses? I don't know that we have a legal responsibility to treat veterans differently, in a positive sense. We cannot treat any identifiable group differently in a negative sense. What transpires from here on is opinion, based somewhat on experience, and somewhat on desire to have students share experiences whenever possible.

Since we haven't had combat era veterans since Vietnam, perhaps a look backwards is necessary. I returned to school fifteen days after an early discharge. I wanted more than anything else to complete a degree interrupted by my own misguided sense of patriotism. I have often said that the military did things to me that no other experience could have (both positive and negative). Over the course of a couple of decades, the experiences are decidedly positive.

My first week "back" at school, I was asked to describe the vocal mechanism, using a model provided by the instructor. I was already a speech major, and probably as cocky outside of class as I am now. This speaking experience was probably the most frightening classroom one I have had. Then, as now, I attribute my fear to the fact that in the military the option to speak was strictly reserved, exercising the option out of place often punished.

After a fairly decent interval, I began teaching, and was later assigned, because of my background, to teach the "vets section" of Speech 101. As near as I can tell, this is the closest SDSU came to giving veterans preferential treatment. A single vets section was

offered each year, and it was mine. To this day, I am not sure separation was necessary. I am sure that a group of veterans can say to each other things they wouldn't say otherwise.

It was a good experience, borne out anecdotally by others who have had veterans in their classes. Veterans tended to be more dedicated students than traditional students, as was apparently the case after World War II. The vets sections had a comraderie I haven't seen in any other Speech 101 section. They understood each other's experiences. Performance level wasn't particularly high, in terms of polished speeches or even written work. But the veterans were willing to follow rules (as one would either expect or not), to delve into topics that traditional students might ignore, and to discuss more openly their experiences. It might be important, in passing, to note that these sections were taught in the mid 70's, and many of the veterans were not combat veterans, but combat era veterans. In my opinion, they were a great group of students, mature and focused.

Still the question--How do we treat veterans? I believe preferential systemic treatment is out. If we enact a new GI Bill, or expand the MGIB, we may get an influx of veterans, but I doubt it. Since so many of the Gulf Era veterans are Guards and Reserves, it is unlikely that a large corps of veterans returning to school will emerge. Rather we will see mobilized students returning, and can ultimately expect some volunteers entering school.

The basic speech course, whatever its format, may be a good place to welcome the veteran to civilian life. If we view academic life and ultimately any course in it as a part of a post-military socialization process, this makes sense.

The Gulf War is/was a media war. In many cases, it is safe to say, we at home knew of the destruction of "target rich" areas long before dug in ground troops did. Over the course of the war, casualty counts were reported, and examined. Compared to even the Beirut incident, the war had few casualties. From the media, we had a rosy picture of the conflict. As any veteran will tell you, the military isn't rosy--combat situations are much less so.

The basic speech course, then, can become a forum for the education of both the veteran (which is its goal) and of the rest of us. Unlike other University courses, the basic speech course should invite openness and sharing. In my own basic course, for example, veterans and others are already (still) talking about the technology of war, the culture of the Middle East, etc. To me, the veteran becomes a vital link to what really happened there. If he or she chooses to talk about experiences in the Gulf arena, it is likely that both the veteran and the class will be better for it.

Indeed, the veteran may choose not to discuss experiences in the military, and this has a place in the basic communication course as well. From my own experiences, however, veterans like to talk, and the forum of the classroom may be significantly non-threatening. While we at home talk incessantly of winning the war and popularizing President Bush, the veteran may wish to share the horror (if it was) of living in a scooped out hollow in the sand, feeling the incessant roar of bombing and knowing the reality of "friendly fire." The veteran may wish to discuss being in a truly foreign culture, where the ugly American was apparently trained to respect rather than defy the cultural norms of the host country.

The basic speech course may be an ideal place to discuss the language choices that permeate the military, and which grew in the public vocabulary during the Gulf War. We became familiar with "hunkering down" and knew our pilots were in a "target rich environment." Surely the returning veteran would have others, less accessible to the public.

The veteran who actively served in the Gulf may be able to address environmental concerns raised by the war. In our basic course, for example, public policy issues are routinely a part of the class culture. We know of the environmental devastation in the Gulf, but the speech course would be a good place to discuss it. Since war and deployment so greatly influences public policy, the veteran, or any other student would have a ripe ground for policy discussion.

Of course, the list of what the veteran could do in the basic course is a long one. As I have implied, military experiences range from the horrorific to the mundane, but they are nonetheless experiences whose discussion may enrich the lives of others. A simple ground rule is necessary: The student (like any other) need not discuss anything he or she feels uncomfortable with. We must protect the student's right to her or his emotions.

My own belief is that the veteran is a student who has valuable experiences to share with a class. As a veteran, I am curious about their military duty. In my own classes, I find myself trying to draw out military anecdotes from these students. We probably do this with a variety of students, and it has its dangers. If, as happened after Vietnam, we create an anti-war culture in our classes, we may also brand the veteran. If, as is possible now, we have a popular conflict, veterans may have favored nation status. Either scenario can have bad consequences for the veteran and the class.

The role of the basic course, and its director, in veterans affairs appears simple. The veteran is an integral part of the educational culture established in the class. It is hoped that basic course directors can clarify the role of the course and its instructors so that the veteran can return to "normalcy" in an academic setting. It is likely that the military and the Guard and Reserve units to which veterans will return will provide support for the transition to civilian life. The classroom should become an extension of the societal support veterans should have. But then education in general should be an extension of support in providing for societal goals.

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